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AUTHOR Woclever, Roberta
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ABSTRACT

The following recommendations for improving the student teaching experience are presented: (1) Select cooperating teachers for their excellence as classroom teachers; (2) Place student teachers in schools and with cooperating teachers that share the educational orientation of their college; (3) Place at least five student teachers in each school; (4) Allocate a minimum of one semester for the supervised student teaching experience; (5) Minimize the gap between theory learned in the college classroom and practical application in the school classroom; (6) Require cooperating teachers to participate in inservice courses in the area of teacher training; (7) Allow cooperating teachers to help determine what will be taught in methods classes; (8) Establish identical evaluation criteria for use by both the cooperating teacher and college supervisor; (9) Require that supervisors of student teachers be college faculty members rather than graduate assistants; and (10) Lighten the research and publication load of the college supervisor. (JD)

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TEN WAYS TO IMPROVE STUDENT TEACHING:

A CASE STUDY

Roberta Woolever
School of Education
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

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The author is an Assistant Professor of Education and Director of the Seawell Project, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

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Ten Ways to Improve Student Teaching:

A Case Study

Most classroom teachers seem to agree on one thing--student teaching was the single most valuable component of their preservice training (Silberman, 1970). This is not to imply that all practice teaching experiences are maximally beneficial or that they necessarily result in the acquisition of desirable teacher attitudes and behaviors.

A critical factor in the outcome of practice teaching, for a given student teacher, is the professional attitude, educational philosophy, and classroom techniques of the critic (or cooperating) teacher who serves as task master, role model, and evaluator. A lesser role in influencing the development of student teacher attitudes and behaviors during the practicum is necessarily assumed by the college or university supervisor. The absolute number of contact hours, the availability as a role model, and the identification of the student teacher with a potential colleague (rather then a college professor) all serve to strengthen the relative effect of the critic teacher over that of the university supervisor.

With the assurance that all student teachers were placed in classrooms with master teachers for an extended period of student teaching, the necessarily limited effect of the university supervisor might not be of major concern. Unfortunately, such assurance cannot be given. University officials charged with securing public school placements for student teachers frequently have little or no say in the selection of specific teachers to serve as critic teachers; the job of selection is most often left to public school central office personnel and school principals.

While some critic teachers may be so designated by virtue of demonstrated excellence in their profession, others may be selected as a personal favor granted by a superior, because every other teacher in the building has had a student teacher and the principal does not know how to respond to an admittedly weak teacher's request that he or she should also be given a student teacher, the teacher needs extended time out of the classroom to work on curriculum development or to do a principal internship, the teacher has been given a split-grade level class or an unusual number of "management problems," or the teacher is approaching retirement and cannot manage alone any longer. (If the foregoing list seems exaggerated, I can assure the reader that I have had personal experience with examples of all of the situations enumerated.)

If one cannot assume then that student teachers will be trained by and will model on master teachers, how can the college or university, which is ultimately charged with the responsibility for teacher training, intervene to maximize potential positive outcomes? The most obvious area for reform is in the selection of critic teachers. This is not a new idea. James Conant, in 1963, recommended as one of 27 formal recommendations for the improvement of the education of teachers that:

> Public school systems that enter into contracts with a college or university for practice teaching should designate, as classroom teachers working with practice teaching, only those persons in whose competence as teachers, leaders, and evaluators they have the highest confidence, and should give such persons encouragement by reducing their work load and raising their salaries [emphasis added]. (p. 63)

More recently, in the fall of 1979, in a joint resolution of the State Board of Education of North Carolina and the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina, the participating parties outlined an approach

to quality assurance in the initial programs for professional personnel in the schools (as well as for continuing conditions of service). With regard to preservice training, one essential element of the program would be:

> Assurance of strong supervision of student teacher experiences through the close coordination of campus-based and field-based program activities which would involve the State Education Agency, institutions of higher education, local education agencies, and successful classroom teachers. This would include the identification, training and uniform compensation of successful classroom teachers who supervise and direct the student teaching experiences to ensure that each individual in professional teacher education has successfully demonstrated his/her ability to perform in an actual classroom situation and to ensure that this supervision is conducted by effective professional educators. This supervision would be developed and conducted in close cooperation with appropriate representatives of the institutions of higher education [emphasis added].

Extending beyond the more selective determination of critic teachers, it is my contention that the role of the university supervisor needs to be redefined to have an increased effect on student teachers. The university supervisor, one should be able to assume, has had classroom teaching experience and has an advanced degree in education. While graduate students in large universities often serve as supervisors, the role is most frequently (Conant, 1963) and appropriately assigned to a college or university faculty member. In the training of student teachers, the critic teacher clearly has an edge over the university supervisor in immediacy of classroom experience and awareness of the many decisions, large and small, which make up the teacher's day. But while, ideally, critic teachers are chosen for their excellence as teachers of school aged children, this does not necessarily imply that they have the knowledge, skills, and experience necessary to be outstanding trainers of teachers.

By contrast, the university supervisor has, again it should go without saying, expertise in the area of teacher training per se and the luxury of time to keep up with current research and innovation in the theory and practice of classroom teaching. (University faculty level supervisors are also under pressure to do research and publish; this may act as a negative force in that faculty members may actively seek to minimize their involvement in the time-consuming task of field supervision.)

The remaining portion of this paper is devoted to ten recommendations designed to increase the influence of college or university faculty in the training of student teachers. Each recommendation is followed by a case study. The model case to be analyzed came about as a result of the joint effort of a School of Education (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill) and a public school system (Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools) in the training of elementary level student teachers.[1] In 1974, one school within the system, Seawell Elementary School, was chosen as the site for an innovative project in teacher training. Seawell Elementary School is an open-space and open-concept school; it has an enrollment of approximately 425 students (grades K-6) and a faculty of 15 classroom teachers (and the equivalent of 8 full-time resource teachers). One University of North Carolina faculty member, the Seawell Project School Director, is assigned by the University's Teacher Education Program to administer the Seawell Project and to teach and supervise the Seawell student teachers for two and one-half days per week.

RECOMMENDATION 1. Acknowledging the relatively large influence of the critic teacher over that of the university supervisor, critic teachers

should be selected on the basis of their demonstrated excellence as classroom teachers. (Critic teachers, once selected, should be adequately compensated for their skills and time.)

Seawell Project School: This recommended practice was not followed. Rather, the principal (Ms. Barbara Lawler) was selected as a "master" principal, and the decision was made that every full-time classroom teacher at Seawell Elementary School would train one student teacher per semester over a three year period; (in 1977, the agreement was extended for a second three-year period). While not every teacher at Seawell could be described as a master teacher, all of the teachers share a commitment to open education, to individualization of instruction, and to individual and group management based on a respect for self and others. (Each critic teacher receives a stipend of fifty dollars per semester; the teachers consider this amount somewhat of a joke.)

Role of University Supervisor: The supervisor attempts to help each student teacher to assess the strengths and weaknesses of his or her particular critic teacher. The supervisor takes a more active role in observing, evaluating, and directing the classroom activities of student teachers who are assigned to less effective critic teachers. Additionally, the supervisor strives to help the less effective teachers to improve their knowledge and skills; this may be done directly or indirectly through expectations established for the student teachers.

RECOMMENDATION 2. To the extent that a college or university teacher education program incorporates a particular philosophy of or approach to education in its prepracticum coursework, the teacher training institution should place student teachers in schools and with critic teachers sharing

this orientation. (It is an idle gesture to spend two to three years, on campus, training a student of education in areas such as humanistic and multicultural education; individualization of instruction; strategies for teaching thinking, decision-making, and valuing skills; and techniques for classroom management based on mutual concern and respect and then to place the student in a practicum situation where the emphasis is on large group instruction, on rote memorization of facts, on control based on the absolute authority of the teacher/principal, and where the teacher serves as a perpetuator of cultural stereotypes and discrimination based on race, sex, family socioeconomic level, or language spoken at home.)

Seawell Project School: As an effectively functioning open-concept school with an exceptional educational leader in the person of the principal, Ms. Barbara Lawler, Seawell School represents the child-centered approach to elementary education advocated by the School of Education faculty concerned with the preparation of teachers for both the early childhood (K-3) and intermediate (4-9) grades.

Role of University Supervisor: To enhance the student teachers effectiveness in an open classroom setting, the Project Director includes general topics such as open education (historical, philosophical, and psychological foundations), individualization of instruction, learning centers, Glasser's reality therapy, and unit and lesson planning for the open classroom in the methods course taught during the first eight weeks of the semester. Additionally, in working with the student teachers as both their professor and supervisor, the Project Director helps the students to deal with the always present discrepancies between the ideal and the reality in education.

RECOMMENDATION 3. Student teachers should be placed in schools in groups of at least five student teachers per school for a given semester. (Grouping will provide student teachers with opportunities to learn with and from their peers, will minimize feelings of isolation, and will facilitate an expanded role for the university supervisor in shaping the student teaching experience.)

Seawell Project School: As noted previously, 15 student teachers are placed at the school each semester.

Role of University Supervisor: The university supervisor should have a part in selecting the schools in which groups of student teachers will be placed during a given semester. Once a school has been selected, the supervisor works with the critic teachers to establish school-wide goals, requirements, and evaluation procedures.

RECOMMENDATION 4. Since becoming a teacher involves a process of socialization as well as training and practice in specific teaching and management skills, the supervised student teaching experience should extend for at least one semester (16-17 weeks).

Seawell Project School: The regular university program requires that student teachers be placed in a practicum setting for only the final eight weeks of the student teaching semester; during the first eight weeks of the semester the students are on campus taking 9 credit hours of university work in "Theory and Practice of Elementary Education" and "Psychology of Learning." This requirement was changed for those student teachers assigned to the Seawell Project. Seawell student teachers spend the whole semester (approximately 17 weeks including the exam period) at the school site maintaining, at a minimum, the critic teachers' hours of 8 to 4. Because the

9 credit hours of university course work in methods of teaching and psychology of learning must be completed during the semester, the Seawell student teachers spend approximately ten hours per week during the first eight weeks of the semester meeting as a class; the final nine weeks are then devoted to full-time student teaching (with class meetings held once a week after school). Virtually all of the university classes are conducted at the elementary school site by university faculty. When the student teachers are not meeting for university classes (a maximum of three hours out of any given eight hour day during the first eight weeks) they are working with their critic teachers in the classroom.

Role of University Supervisor: During the first eight weeks of the semester, the university faculty member who serves as the Seawell Project Director teaches the course on "Theory and Practice of Elementary Education" (for 6 credit hours) and coordinates the teaching of the "Psychology of Learning" course which is taught by a university specialist in this area. During the last nine weeks of the semester, the Project Director assumes the role of university supervisor and observes students, in the classroom, on a weekly basis.

RECOMMENDATION 5. The gap between formal classroom instruction, in the theory and practice of learning and teaching, and the application of this knowledge and the development of associated skills should be minimized. (In the most ambitious teacher education program, this would require the faculty who teach methods of teaching mathematics to observe and evaluate the student teachers teaching math, the reading faculty to observe and evaluate for the application of techniques in reading, etc. In a less complex arrangement, one faculty member would be responsible for field

observations and evaluation, across subject areas, but would maintain close contact with the methods faculty to ensure continuity of the program from campus to field setting.)

Seawell Project School: This recommendation has only been met in part. In two of the major curricular areas, language arts and mathematics students receive instruction in methods and materials on campus but are not supervised in the field by their instructors for these courses. By contrast, the 6 credit hour course which is taught at the Seawell site, and which focuses on methods and materials for social studies and science education, is taught by the same faculty member (the Project Director) who later acts as the field supervisor. During the last nine weeks of the semester, each student teachers is observed by the Project Director teaching social studies and science as well as reading and mathematics. An additional link between formal course work and practical application is created by the requirement that each team of student teachers develop and teach a four week science unit and a four week social studies unit; these units, which include group experiences as well as extensive weekly learning centers, are carefully evaluated by the Project Director and serve as the basis for the grade given in the 6 credit hour course on "Methods and Materials of Elementary Education."

Role of University Supervisor: The supervisor provides instruction in science and social studies methods and observes and evaluates field performance in these subject areas. She also observes and evaluates field performance in mathematics and language arts while maintaining close contact with the faculty members who teach the methods courses on campus in these areas. In addition, the Director coordinates the teaching of the "Psychology

of Learning" course at the Seawell site to ensure that the content is consistent with the philosophy and practice of the Seawell faculty, and she observes student teachers for specific classroom management skills which have been taught as a part of the psychology course content.

RECOMMENDATION 6. Critic teachers should be required to participate in inservice courses in the area of teacher training per se as well as in current practices in their teaching field.

Seawell Project School: Since the inception of the project, the faculty has participated in a number of workshops and extended inservice courses. Time for the inservice classes has been found during teacher workdays, after school, and during the regular school day after student teachers had assumed the major responsibility for classroom teaching. Topics for the inservice classes were suggested by the Project Director, the principal, and/or members of the Seawell faculty and have included: "How to be a Trainer of Teachers," "Teaching the New Social Studies," "Curriculum Development in Science and Social Studies," "Phonics and Reading." Where appropriate, arrangements were made with the school district to grant renewal credit to teachers for inservice participation.

Role of University Supervisor: The Project Director canvasses the faculty for suggested topics, at times takes the initiative and convinces the faculty that a need exists, and teaches the inservice sessions or (less frequently) arranges for a university colleague to provide the needed instruction.

RECOMMENDATION 7. Critic teachers should play a role in determining what will be taught in methods classes, the experiences which will be common

to all student teachers, and the competencies for which all student teachers will be held accountable.

Seawell Project School: From the beginning, all of the teachers as well as the principal have participated in the development, evaluation, and refinement of the project. Once the project was under way, provision was made for formal written teacher evaluation of the project at the end of each semester. At least one lengthy meeting is held at the end of each semester (while the student teachers get practice in managing the class with the critic teacher out of sight) during which the written project evaluations are discussed and plans are made for the procedures and requirements to be used for the next semester.

Role of University Supervisor: The university supervisor was involved in the initial conceptualization of the project and is responsible for ensuring ongoing evaluation and planned change based on the input of all involved participants, including the student teachers. The supervisor attends the weekly Seawell Faculty Planning Meeting to keep up with current concerns in the school as a whole and to seek direction in solving immediate problems related to the teacher training project. (See also the supervisor's role in relation to recommendations 2 and 8.)

While the Project Director has the final word and responsibility in determining what content will be taught in the 6 credit hour course on "Theory and Pracitce of Elementary Education," she has made every effort to include topics of particular concern to the Seawell faculty (e.g., Glasser's reality therapy, integration of learning centers, Madeline Hunter's seven-step lesson plan) while advocating an approach to science and social studies education which is consistent with her advanced knowledge of current theories, research, and practices.

RECOMMENDATION 8. The same observation and evaluation criteria and procedures should be used by both the critic teacher and the university supervisor, and the student teachers should have a clear understanding of the procedures to be used and the criteria against which they will be evaluated.

Seawell Project School: The Seawell faculty, principal, and Project Director worked together to develop a list of "Pod Competencies." These competencies include skills in specific subject areas as well as such skills as managing lunch, lines, dismissal, and the ability to plan and carry out a field trip. Students are given a list of the "Pod Competencies" at the beginning of the semester and are evaluated on them during the eleventh or twelfth week of the semester (the mid-point of the full-time student teaching) and at the end of the semester.

During the final nine weeks of the semester, students are formally observed and evaluated while engaged in small and large group instruction. Using a set of five graduated "Classroom Observation Guides," organized into a hierarchy of generic teaching skills, both the critic teacher and a unviersity supervisor (the Project Director or her Graduate Assistant) observe each student teacher at least once a week and provide both oral and written feedback. (The Classroom Observation Guides are constructed such that the student teacher receives an evaluation rating on each specific skill included at each of the five levels of skill development.)

Role of University Supervisor: The supervisor worked with the faculty and principal to develop the Pod Competencies and the Classroom Observation Guides. She (along with her Graduate Assistant) participates with the critic teacher and the student teacher in the mid-term and final evaluation conferences and observes the student teacher (at least weekly) for group teaching and management skills. The critic teacher is encouraged to

observe as frequently as possible and to share observations and concerns with the university supervisor during the time of his or her weekly observation.

RECOMMENDATION 9. All student teaching experiences should be directly supervised by college or university faculty members, not by graduate assistants or by staff members employed for the sole purpose of supervision.

Seawell Project School: As previously outlined, all Seawell student teachers are observed weekly by a university supervisor--either the Project Director of her Graduate Assistant. The Graduate Assistant is never given complete responsibility for even a subset of the 15 student teachers. Rather, the Project Director and the Graduate Assistant alternate from week to week which specific students each will observe during that week.

Role of University Supervisor: The Project Director selects the graduate student who will serve as the Graduate Assistant. The Graduate Assistant is instructed in the use of the five structured Classroom Observation Guides and the procedures to be used in following up each observation with an individual conference. The Project Director and her graduate Assistant meet at least weekly to discuss the progress and/or problems of the students each has most recently observed. Each week the Project Director reads through the carbon copies of the written evaluations given by the Graduate Assistant to the student teachers he or she has observed during that week.

RECOMMENDATION 10. The university supervisor, in so far as he or she assumes the role of a field-based professor and administrator, should not be held accountable for original research and publication to the extent that are non-field oriented faculty members. (James Conant recommended that

the role of the university supervisor of student teaching should be that of a "clinical professor"; the expectation was that a clinical professor would not necessarily hold a Ph.D. or a tenure track university position, would not be expected to do research and writing, and would return to school classroom teaching every few years to renew his or her first hand experience. I reject the notion of the supervisor as a clinical professor as outlined by Conant; the selection only of master teachers to serve as critic teachers would serve the same function and would reserve the advantage of the unique contributions of a university supervisor who has a doctorate and a regular university position.)

Seawell Project School: This recommendation is not currently followed. The job of Project Director, in theory, involves a commitment of two and one-half days a week for the full semester to provide instruction and supervision for 15 student teachers and to attend to the general administration of the project itself. A Graduate Assistantship has regularly been provided for 10 hours per week. Since the Project Director is a regular university faculty member, she also has commitments to attend Divisional and School of Education faculty meetings, serve on internal committees, keep current in her area of specialization, advise students, direct independent work by graduate students, as well as to do empirical research, publish, etc., etc., etc.

Role of University Supervisor: The supervisor must make every effort to convince the university powers-that-be of the desirability of a strong role for the university supervisor in the training of maximally successful teachers and to make clear the time commitment required for effective university supervision. Meanwhile, the university supervisor is well advised to carry on research, ideally using the field setting in which he or she is most often found, and to publish in the interest of self-preservation.

Notes

1. For a description of the establishment and governance of the Seawell Project see: Lynn Curry, 'The future of teaching training: A North Carolina model," UNC News Letter, 1978, 63, 7-9.

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